

**USDA Forest Service Centennial
Hearing before the House Agriculture Committee
Testimony by Dr. John A. Helms
On behalf of
The Society of American Foresters
June 22, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today on the USDA Forest Service, its progress over the past century and opportunities as we look to the future. As President of the Society of American Foresters (SAF), whom I represent today, I would like to express our thanks to the Committee for its continuing support for forestry and forests, both public and private. SAF represents over 16,000 professionals who work everyday as stewards of both public and private forests that each and every individual in our society relies on for the essentials of life. Throughout the past century, SAF has grown up with the Forest Service, starting from the very beginning when Gifford Pinchot first led both organizations. SAF throughout its history has been greatly involved in policy debates surrounding the Forest Service and the federal lands. A recent example of this involvement is an SAF task force report titled *Forest of Discord: Options for Governing Our National Forests and Federal Public Lands* (1999) which depicts some of the current problems facing the agency and outlines recommendations to improve management of the federal lands. SAF continues to partner with the USDA Forest Service as we have from the very beginning, to achieve our common goal: making sure this country's forest resources are managed to benefit current and future generations.

The Forest Service has had many successes in land management throughout the past century. These successes are marked by many challenges as well. In the early years, the Agency was commonly regarded as the prime example of a well functioning federal agency. As such, probably the greatest success of the Agency in the first part of the century was establishing and implementing management practices to meet the needs of the public on the 192 million acres of national forest system lands. The phrase --to meet the needs of the public-- is particularly important and should remain the cornerstone of the Agency's mission. Today, this concept is fraught with many challenges. Until recently, not only has the Forest Service applied the best available science to the management of the national forest system lands in efforts to keep them healthy and resilient, they have, at the same time, strived to meet the continuously changing expectations of the people for whom these lands are managed. Currently though, the Forest Service faces severe issues related to declining forest health, invasive species, and increasing risk of wildfire making the successes seen in the first part of the century difficult to attain in the latter half.

In the early days of the Agency, the Congress and the public demanded a timber supply, range allotments, and protection for water resources. Then came needs for fire protection and many other concerns until today where the Agency seeks to meet often competing expectations for such needs as forest products, watershed protection, wildlife and fish

habitat, grazing leases, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic beauty. Recently, however, these growing public expectations have become increasingly challenging.

Today, with conflicting and overlapping legislative mandates, the Forest Service does not have a clear mission or vision guiding the management of the national forests. As the demands on federal forests change, the Forest Service's legislative mandates have become increasingly complex, conflicting, and outdated with laws such as the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and regulations as well as continual court challenges and decisions. This situation will not be resolved until Congress closely examines these conflicting mandates and clarifies the mission and goals of the national forest system in light of today's growing and changing public attitudes.

This problem is manifested with today's multiple-use mandate for these public lands. At the time it was established the multiple-use framework for these lands made sense. However, as society's relationships with its forests becomes more complex, this framework has been interpreted to mean all things for all people on all lands. The idea of providing diverse goods and services from the national forest system lands is still a laudable goal. However, our understanding of forests has changed dramatically since this concept was put into place. We have seen a significant shift from simply providing for all these uses to managing for healthy, resilient forests with provision of tangible uses becoming secondary to ensuring that forest systems function in a balanced manner. This shift to an "ecosystem management" or "sustainability" approach is not reflected in the current mandates for the agency, particularly in the outdated Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960.

Because of this shift, Congress needs to examine whether the multiple use framework for national forest system lands should remain the Agency's prime focus. While the idea that the Forest Service should provide a balanced variety of goods and services from these lands remains desirable, perhaps this is better founded on principles of sustainability. This concept is based on the fundamental interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic processes and values. Each of these is a critically important component for ensuring that forest resources can be sustained over time. In lieu of applying this principle we see federal forests as a currently unsustainable resource with significant forest health and protection issues. Until the mission and purposes of federal lands are clarified and a framework for management is provided, the nation's forests will never be sustained for the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run.

With the articulation of new congressionally designated mission, the Agency can begin to rebuild trust with the public whom they serve. Other challenges exist such as shrinking budgets, retiring personnel who are not being replaced with those having similar integrated education unique to the forestry profession, and limited public understanding of renewable resource use and management as the population becomes increasingly urbanized. However, clarifying the Agency's mission and purpose is a critical prerequisite to enabling the Agency to truly "protect the land and serve the people".

As an interim measure to begin moving forward, Congress should consider authorizing the testing of different approaches to sustainable land management through the use of pilot projects. Although not a new idea, it is an important mechanism that allows examination of alternative approaches to adaptive management prior to adoption on a broader scale. Stewardship contracting is one recent example of a pilot program that was tested, found useful, and applied on a more widespread scale. We continue to learn how to perform stewardship contracting better, and hopefully, with Congress' help, we can take those lessons and improve the law. The Forest Service has a unique capacity to use the pilot approach because of its distinctive functions of both research and practical on-the-ground management that directly or indirectly affects the 749 million acres public and private forests. No other federal land management agency has these unique functions within their domain to the extent occurring in the Forest Service. The concept of pilot projects integrates the decentralized nature of the Agency, permitting local and site specific needs to be addressed and helping with public interactions at the local level.

There may also be reasons to think more boldly about whether the correct implementation model is being applied. The nation has developed a federal/state partnership in the implementation of such landmark environmental measures as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Surface Mining Reclamation Act. Yet there has been an assumption that federal land policy should only be developed and implemented at the federal level. Recent changes of the Roadless Rule recognize that states have a defined interest in federal lands and it may be worth looking at greater involvement across all federal lands issues.

In considering the future I'd like to focus on three areas that I find enormously important for their potential to have dramatic affect on the stewardship of forest resources, both domestic and international. These are: sustainable stewardship of federal forests to meet the diverse needs of society, the role of the Agency in providing leadership in state and private forestry, and the need for a dynamic research arm to provide the knowledge base necessary for science-informed decision making.

First and most importantly, the Forest Service must serve as professional managers and stewards of the nation's federal forests. Throughout the world, history has shown that the health and welfare of society is dependent on the health and welfare of forests. This requires the Agency to have a Congressionally-mandated mission and a dedicated and adequately-sized professional staff. It is imperative that the nation's federal forests be professionally managed to meet in perpetuity the diverse needs of the people – from sustainable wood supplies to wilderness – in a balanced, ecologically sound way. To pay for the costs of sustainable management, the Forest Service needs to revisit Gifford Pinchot's basic concept that public land management should pay for itself. While this certainly won't happen overnight and some activities understandably won't be able to pay for themselves, it is a worthwhile goal where feasible and should not be ignored.

Secondly, the State and Private Forestry functions of the Agency are critically important. The United States is unique in having such a diversity of forest ownerships including

federal, state, industrial, private non-industrial, and tribal. In particular, the Forest Service can assist the states and the private sector in reaching the more than 10 million family forest landowners. In total, the state and private forestry functions of the Forest Service have the potential to influence over two-thirds of this country's forests as compared with the one-quarter affected by the national forest system. These private forests provide the bulk of our domestic supply of forest products, cover a much larger portion of watersheds, supply millions of jobs and fuel economies in rural areas across America, serve as habitat for wildlife and fish species, and offer growing recreational, hunting, and fishing opportunities. It is these forest lands, however, that are most vulnerable to conversion, fragmentation and parcelization. Unless all forest lands are well managed and meet owners' economic and personal needs, their conversion to other uses will dramatically impact the overall health and welfare of the nation. Congress could enhance the development of better linkages and integration among forest land ownerships to ensure that society benefits from the diverse functions these lands provide. We appreciate the work that this Committee and you, Mr. Chairman, have done to emphasize forests in the broader natural resources arena and hope we can continue to assist you in this endeavor.

The third priority area is the forestry research and development function of the Forest Service. In these times of greatest information needs we have a Forest Service research arm that has had a 50 percent decline in numbers of scientists – from 985 scientists in 1985 to 468 today. This precipitous decline in research capacity seems quite indefensible given the enormous and expanding demand for new techniques and understanding needed to deal with the complex interaction of biological, managerial, and social issues involved in sustainable forest management. The Forest Service research arm can probably never have all the scientists needed to address all these complex resource issues alone. Consequently, greater emphasis should be placed on increasing high-quality collaboration with other research bodies such as the forestry schools, private industry, non profits, and others. In addition, to make the best use of scarce resources, the Forest Service could establish better connections with the users of forestry research, making this information accessible and usable by on-the-ground practitioners.

Over the last 100 years, the Agency's prime concerns have evolved through custodial, utilitarian, and stewardship approaches. Given the supreme importance of sustained, healthy, diverse forests to the nation's welfare, the Forest Service must have a clear mandate, clear and consistent laws and regulations that guide federal forest land management, provide leadership in management and conservation across all forest land owners, and have a research arm of sufficient capacity to permit the best possible decisions and forest policy development.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and contribute to discussion as part of the 100th year celebration of the USDA Forest Service.

**Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form**

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2003.

Name: Dr. John A. Helms

Address: Dept/ ESPM Ecosystem Science, 151 Hilgard Hall 3110, Berkeley, CA ,
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Organization you represent (if any): Society of American Foresters

- 1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2003, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:**

Source: _____ **Amount:** _____

Source: _____ **Amount:** _____

- 2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2003, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:**

USDA Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis User's Group (annually): average \$8,000

USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, Knowledge Acquisition Survey: \$14630

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: John A. Helms

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**Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses**

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Dr. John A. Helms

2. Business Address: Dept/ ESPM Ecosystem Science, 151 Hilgard Hall 3110, Berkeley, CA 94720-3110

3. Business Phone Number: (510) 642-5037

4. Organization you represent: Society of American Foresters

5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:

Professor, Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley, retired 1994
UC Berkeley: professor, silviculture 1964-94, chair Department of Forestry 1989-93
Forester, Tasmanian Forestry Commission, Australia, 1953-59

6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:

Unviwersity of Washington: PhD silviculture 1963; MF forest management 1960;
Diploma of forestry, Australian Forestry School, 1953; BS Forestry, Unviwersity of Sydney, Australia, 1953; Instructor and participant in workshops, conferences, national conventions, including SAF Leadership Academy, 1998, 1997. Registered Professional Forester, California. SAF member since 1969. SAF Council member representing California and Hawaii 2001-03; Forest Science and Technology Board Chair, 1995-98, member 1991-93. Comissioner, California Forest Products Comission 2003-06; Deputy coordinator, International Union of Forest Research Organizations' Forest Terminology Working Party, 2001-present.

7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:

President, Society of American Foresters

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